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ABSTRACT

New Futures School (NFS), located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is a comprehensive program for adolescent parents. NFS is an alternative school of the Albuquerque Public Schools and is supported by a non-profit, community-based organization, New Futures, Inc. There are two departments of the NFS in-school program: the Perinatal Program, serving the teenager who enters during her pregnancy and remains until the end of the semester in which her child is born, and the Young Parents' Center, serving school-aged mothers and fathers who cannot successfully participate in a regular school program in the year(s) following the birth of their child(ren). Educational services of the NFS include academic classes required for high school graduation, special education classes, classes to prepare the young mother to care for herself during pregnancy, vocational classes, and classes in parenting and child development. Health services include individual health counseling, group health instruction, and nutrition counseling. Additionally, each client is provided individual counseling upon request. Each NFS student is involved in group counseling once a week through one of her classes, and weekly counseling groups are held for those young women who are considering relinquishing their children and for other students with special needs. NFS operates three child care facilities; offers employability training and vocational awareness instruction; and includes outreach, volunteer service, primary prevention, technical assistance, and networking functions. (RH)

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NEW FUTURES SCHOOL - AN OVERVIEW

New Futures School is a comprehensive program for adolescent parents located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. As a comprehensive program it offers educational, health, counseling, vocational, and child care services to pregnant adolescents and adolescent parents. It is an alternative school of the Albuquerque Public Schools and is also supported by a non-profit, community-based organization, New Futures, Inc.

New Futures School was begun by the Albuquerque Y.W.C.A. The group of volunteers who initiated the program were responding to dual concerns ---- the expulsion from school of pregnant adolescents and the health problems associated with adolescent pregnancy. The public school system agreed to grant credits for classes taught by the certified, volunteer teachers; its initial commitment went no further. The program opened in the basement of the Y.W.C.A. with two students in January, 1970.

Since that day, over 3,000 adolescent mothers have been provided services by New Futures School. When the Y.W.C.A., in 1976, expressed its desire to cease sponsorship, the Albuquerque Public Schools, which had steadily increased its involvement and financial commitments to the program, assumed primary responsibility for the program. At the same time a new community-based organization dedicated to furthering the cause of services for adolescent parents was formed so that community involvement and support could be maintained. This organization, New Futures, Inc., maintains vital linkages between New Futures School and the community. It also reaches beyond New Futures School to other parts of New Mexico and to other states to provide community awareness and technical assistance regarding needs and services related to adolescent pregnancy. Some services of New Futures School are funded by grants which channel through New Futures, Inc. The books written by New Futures School staff ---- Teenage Pregnancy: A New Beginning for teen parents, Un Nuevo Comienzo, its Spanish language counterpart, and Working With Childbearing Adolescents --- are published and distributed by New Futures, Inc. as is the video tape "See What The Future Will Bring".

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The Albuquerque Public School has continued its strong support of New Futures School and has enabled it to offer expanding services

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IN SCHOOL SERVICES: There are two departments of the New Futures School in-school program. The largest and oldest, now called the Perinatal Program, serves the teen who enters during her pregnancy and remains until the end of the semester in which her child is born. (If the child is less than 3 months old at the time, the mother may remain through the next semester). A girl may receive services in this program for only one pregnancy. The full range of educational and support services described below is provided. The second department, called the Young Parents' Center, began in October, 1979. It is designed to serve school-age mothers and fathers who, for identified reasons, cannot successfully participate in a regular school program in the year(s) following the birth of their child(ren). Enrollment is limited, with students accepted after a screening process. The Young Parents' Center, therefore, serves the most high risk of a high risk group. It, too, offers the full range of educational and support services described below. Our clients may remain in this program as long as their need exists if they are showing steady progress toward their diploma or GED. Individual contracts may be used to specify expectations and measures of progress.

During the 1983-84 school year over 425 adolescent mothers were enrolled in New Futures School programs. The majority were Spanish-surnamed (53 percent), with Anglos (24 percent), Blacks (6 percent), and American Indians (15 percent) also included in the population. Nineteen percent of the Perinatal Program students were married; twenty-two percent of the Young Parents' Center students were married. Thirty-three percent of the Perinatal students were school drop-outs before their pregnancy; seventy-two percent of the YPC students have been school drop-outs.

Education The education services of New Futures School include those academic classes which are required for high school graduation, Special Education classes, classes to prepare the young mother for caring for herself during pregnancy, vocational classes, and classes in parenting and child development. All of these courses carry credit toward graduation. All classes are taught by teachers accredited in the specific teaching area. Both full-time and part-time teachers are utilized. A student may take as few as two or as many as six classes. Classes are success-oriented and, in most cases, individually paced. Academic levels range from basic skills to college preparatory. Close contact is maintained with the student's previous school to facilitate smooth transitions to and from New Futures School. A GED preparatory class is offered for those students for whom high school graduation seems an unreachable goal.

Health Health services include individual health counseling, group health instruction, and nutrition counseling. The health staff consists of a Health Director who is an R.N. with a Masters degree in Health Education, another R.N. with a Masters in Health Education, a third R.N., and an L.P.N. A health history is taken for each student when she enrolls. At this time the health staff determine whether the pregnant girl is receiving regular prenatal care. If she is not, she is immediately helped to select a health care provider and to begin receiving regular prenatal care. The health staff follow the young mother's health status throughout her pregnancy. A home visit is made in the two weeks following delivery. After the girl's return to school, the nurses continue to be health resources for the young mother and her baby.

Group health instruction is provided through Personal and Child Health, a required class taught by the nurse/health educators, which focuses on perinatal health care. This class meets daily for eighteen weeks. The nurse/health educators also teach health topics in Care and Raising of Toddlers, a parenting class required for Young Parents' Center students which is taught by a team of a parenting teacher and a counselor. Birth control information is a part of health instruction. The NFS philosophy is, however, that a teenager's decision to utilize family planning involves much more than birth control information. Many aspects of the program, such as parenting education, development of vocational goals and skills, and the development of increased self-confidence and a positive self image impact upon the young woman's decision to utilize family planning and upon her ability to follow through with that decision.

Supervision of the health status of children in the NFS child care facilities is also a part of the health staff responsibility.

The Health Director also teaches evening childbirth education for the young women and their labor coaches - young fathers or family members.

Some students enter NFS having already had their children. Health histories are completed for both parent and child when these young women (and occasionally young men) enroll. Health services for these young parents focus on assisting the young parent to learn about good health practices for her child as well as herself.

A nutrition analysis is done with each new student by the school's nurses. Suggestions for improvement, based upon the positive elements of the young woman's diet and taking into consideration her personal situation and cultural preferences, are made in individual conferences. The breakfast and lunch programs provided at New Futures by the Albuquerque Public Schools are an important part of the nutrition services of NFS. The regular school menus are modified by the staff and a salad bar is always available.

The University of New Mexico School of Medicine's Maternity and Infant Care Project operates a weekly prenatal clinic in our facility for NFS students. The services of this clinic are free. Delivery charges at the UNM Hospital are based on a sliding fee scale. The School of Medicine also brings a Family Practice Clinic, staffed by a resident, to NFS once a week. A weekly WIC Clinic is also held at the school. The Public Health Department brings a Well-Child Clinic to the school once a month.

Counseling and Social Services Counseling and social services are the third component of New Futures School's comprehensive services. At New Futures these services are provided by individuals with Masters degrees in counseling. Several have had social work experience also. Each client is provided individual counseling whenever requested. Each NFS student is involved in group counseling once a week through one of her classes. In addition, weekly counseling groups are held for those young women who are considering relinquishing their children and, from time to time, for other students with special needs. A psychologist is available one morning a week to work with especially difficult cases.

Counselors encourage clients to consider their plans for supporting themselves and their child. Opportunities for post-secondary education or technical training are made known through field trips, speakers, and literature. Vocational counseling is emphasized as clients near the end of their enrollment in New Futures.

Counselors must be knowledgeable about the Albuquerque community and its resources. Counselors make referrals for the young woman, her husband or boyfriend, or family members to appropriate social and governmental agencies. Referrals are followed up to ensure that the client contacts the designated agency and to learn if the needed service is received and understood. Counselors usually maintain personal communication with key individuals in agencies frequently utilized by NFS clients.

Individual counseling may also include the young man with whom the girl is involved or family members. Group counseling activities in the form of "Family Nights" and "Grandparents Group" are also scheduled to reach beyond the young mother to significant others in her life.

Child Care Facilities New Futures School operates three child care facilities on its premises for children of NFS clients. Each is licensed to serve 25 children. The child care facilities serve four functions: (1) provision of child care which enables young mothers to continue program participation; (2) provision of an opportunity for staff to observe the young mother, and sometimes the father, in a parenting relationship to the child; (3) provision of the opportunity for a young mother to breastfeed with minimum interference with her educational program; (4) provision of laboratory experiences for students in Child Development, Children's Literature, and Care & Raising of Toddlers classes. The child care facilities are under the direction of a teacher trained in Home Economics and are staffed by para-professional caregivers and NFS students. Developmental activities for children are included in the daily program. Child care is provided only while the child's mother is in class. One child care center serves the Perinatal component of New Futures; the other two serve the Young Parents' Center.

Employment-related Services Employability training and vocational awareness make up the employment-related services of New Futures School. These programs have been developed out of the experience of earlier CETA-funded programs which received good third-party evaluations. Current employability training programs stress the importance of job-finding and job-keeping skills. Students who successfully complete an initial classroom 10-unit series are placed in subsidized jobs in the private sector. They remain in a Jobs Training class for one semester, and must continue to pass this class and their three other classes in order to retain their subsidized job. This employability training program is for teen mothers whose child is at least three (3) months old. Counseling helps the young mother to learn to combine her parenting responsibilities with participation in the labor force.

Monthly vocational awareness activities are provided for all NFS students. These activities include speakers in classrooms, all-school assemblies, and field trips.

OUTREACH New Futures operates an outreach program which targets school-alienated youth in a low-income area of our community. This program, staffed by a bilingual nurse, sees students, primarily on a one-to-one basis, in their homes or neighborhoods. The nurse works with the young parents regarding life management skills, health practices (particularly prenatal health care, family planning, and child care), and educational/vocational needs and opportunities.

PROJECT REDIRECTION Project Redirection was initiated at New Futures School in the fall of 1983. Community volunteers, carefully selected and trained, work with pregnant or parenting teens on a one-to-one basis in their neighborhoods. Most teens being served by this program are enrolled in classes at NFS, or are in the South Valley Outreach Program. The volunteers, called Community Women, assist teens to acquire life management skills and help them to formulate and achieve short-term and long-term goals. Project Redirection also includes a vocational component which serves clients of all New Futures programs with employment-related workshops, field trips and seminars.

PRIMARY PREVENTION New Futures School responds to requests from schools, churches, and community agencies for presentations aimed at reducing teen pregnancy. The focus of these presentations is on helping teens to understand the realities and responsibilities of teen parenthood, and on leading teens to consider how a teen pregnancy would affect their individual lives. New Futures students may participate in these presentations. Extensive use is made of the audio-visual made by New Futures, Inc. with student participation, "See What The Future Will Bring". Fifteen hundred to two thousand teens are reached annually with these presentations.

New Futures, Inc. sponsors training series for parents of pre-teens entitled "Family Talks". The program is designed to assist parents to become the primary sex educators of their children. It focuses on assisting children to develop a strong sense of self-worth.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & NETWORKING New Futures School played a lead role in the organization of the New Mexico Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy & Parenting, which now includes nearly 300 members from throughout the state. New Futures staff have assisted with community development activities which have resulted in the establishment of programs for pregnant and parenting adolescents in a number of other New Mexico communities. As independent consultants or via technical assistance contracts, New Futures staff provide workshops, training and technical assistance to adolescent

pregnancy programs and concerned agencies and organizations throughout the United States and Canada.

A number of written materials and audio-visuals have been developed by New Futures School. These materials are marketed nationally and internationally by New Futures, Inc.

New Futures School staff serve on the Boards of the New Mexico Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy & Parenting (NMOAPP) and the National Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy & Parenting (NOAPP) and the Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting Western Regional Education Committee (TAPP/WREC). Various staff members are also active as board, committee, or task force members of many local and state organizations. We believe that networking and provision of assistance to other agencies is very important.

The services of New Futures School have had demonstrated benefits for the participants and for the community. Repeat pregnancy rates for NFS clients are less than a third of the national rates for teenage pregnancies. A study in 1981 found that 94 percent of NFS students contacted had either completed a secondary education or were still in school. Perhaps equally important are the observations that NFS clients are better adjusted young women who have learned from their experiences, who face the future with increased confidence and abilities, and who have developed parenting skills which will provide their children with a better chance in life.

The services of New Futures School would not be possible without the close cooperation of many community agencies and interested individuals. Referrals and services are shared between many agencies.

Information regarding New Futures School is shared with others as an example of what can be done, not as a model for others to replicate. The key points for replication are the comprehensive and coordinated nature of the services. Each community must develop a structure for services which is appropriate to its own resources, agency relationships, and leadership patterns. The services of NFS were not all begun at one time; they developed from student needs as resources and staff capabilities became available.

One final point must not be forgotten. Students at New Futures School, when asked why they like the program and would recommend it to others, comment most frequently on the positive relationships between themselves and the staff. A service structure will be ineffective if it is not operated by people who care. The staff members of New Futures School are selected for and evaluated on their competence, their respect for each individual, their respect for multi-ethnic traditions and cultures, and their genuine belief in the capability of each client. New Futures School will continue to be successful as long as its clients say..... "At New Futures School, I found people who cared".

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